As a ‘Medieval Warm Period’ prevailed in western Europe during the tenth and eleventh centuries, the eastern Mediterranean region, from the Nile to the Oxus, was suffering from a series of climatic disasters which led to the decline of some of the most important civilizations and cultural centres of the time. This provocative study argues that many well-documented but apparently disparate events – such as recurrent drought and famine in Egypt, mass migrations in the steppes of central Asia, and the decline in population in urban centres such as Baghdad and Constantinople – are connected and should be understood within the broad context of climate change. Drawing on a wealth of textual and archaeological evidence, Ronnie Ellenblum explores the impact of climatic and ecological change across the eastern Mediterranean in this period and offers a new perspective on why this was a turning point in the history of the Islamic world.

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THE COLLAPSE OF THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Climate Change and the Decline of the East, 950–1072

RONNIE ELLENBLUM

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I believe the thesis presented in this book should apply to the general public and not only to professional Orientalists, and...
therefore I made several concessions such as not using diacritics in placenames and words that can be Romanized or westernized to make it more accessible. I did use diacritics and Hijri calendars, however, for names of people and in direct transliterations from the Arabic.

The book was written while events similar to the ones therein described were shaking the entire world. Food prices were soaring, hunger prevailed in east Africa, and the Danube and the Black Sea were covered with ice. Kingdoms and realms of the eastern Mediterranean, from Tunisia through Libya to Egypt, and the bureaucracies of the same region, from Syria to Greece, undergo radical changes and are on the verge of collapse. Political and economical transformations are translated into cultural ones: religious fanaticism is leading to radical changes in the school curriculum and is impacting upon the education of future generations. The present volume suggests a common reason that led, a millennium ago, to the economic, cultural and political decline of the eastern Mediterranean. Is it possible to assume that a common reason, possibly a period of similar climatic change, is responsible for the present decline of extensive parts of the eastern Mediterranean? I leave it to readers to decide and find out.

This book is dedicated with love to my wife Lenore and to my children Gali, Yuval and Maya.